A REAL PLACE CALLED HEAVEN

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A REAL PLACE CALLED HEAVEN

A Real Place Called Heaven

My mother went home to be with Jesus on December 25, 2000. My dad, sister, and I, with a few others, were by her side during her final moments here on earth. It was about 4:30 pm. Each breath she breathed came as a result of great effort. Then slowly, like a flickering candle about to go out, her breathing gradually became weaker and weaker. Cancer had eaten into her lungs and there was nothing more the doctors could do, to help her recover. In those final moments, with her hand in mine, I prayed in the Spirit. The words of our Lord Jesus—"*I am the resurrection and the life*"—immediately came to my mind. I knew what the rest of the verse said, but I did not want to dwell on it. I did not want to accept the fact that my mother was dying. I prayed, "Jesus, you said you are the resurrection and the life." I repeated that over and over. I was hoping that by a miracle my mother would live. But within minutes, she was gone. With tears streaming down our cheeks and choked voices, we tried to sing the chorus, "He is Lord, He is Lord. He is risen from the dead and He is Lord."

In the days that followed, I read many of the Scriptures that describe death and the life hereafter. I made a choice to believe what the Bible teaches us about death and heaven. These words brought great strength, comfort, peace, courage, and hope. I share some of these with you in this book. All of us, at some time or the other, will come face to face with death and the passing away of a loved one. My prayer is that the Word of God that brought us comfort will do the same for you, in your hour of need.

Every human being will die once. The Scriptures teach us, "*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). This eliminates reincarnation—the idea of cycles of birth–death–rebirth—with opportunities to make amends for the sins of the previous life. Every person goes through this life just once, faces death except for those who will be "caught up" (1 Thessalonians 4:17), and then steps into eternity.

We are eternal beings. Our present physical bodies are just temporary residences for the eternal part of us—our spirits and souls. Death is simply a separation. The eternal—our spirits and souls, leaves the temporary—our bodies, at the time of death (James 2:26). The spirit and soul of a person will continue to exist, either in heaven or in hell.

Life After This Life

John 11:25-26
25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

As people who believe the Bible, we are assured that death is not the end. Those who die believing in Jesus, will live. When a believer in Christ dies, that believer's soul and spirit go to be with Jesus in heaven. That person's body seems lifeless, but that person is still alive. That person is merely living in a different world—a world that we cannot normally look at. One day, "… *God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus … and the dead in Christ will rise first*" (1 Thessalonians 4:14,16).

That is why the Bible refers to death as "sleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15). From our natural perspective, because the dead body is inactive, as is the case when a person is asleep, so also death is considered as sleeping. Soon, when the day breaks and the Lord Jesus who is the "Sun of Righteousness" (Malachi 4:2) and the "Light of the world" (John 8:12) comes, those who have died will awaken out of their "sleep," with new resurrected bodies.

Since we are convinced that there is life after this life—both presently and in the resurrection—we do not "*sorrow as others who have no hope*." We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our loved ones who have died in Christ are alive and well, this very moment. Their physical bodies will surely be raised, and we will see them. This death—this separation—is only temporary.

Stepping Out Of Earth, Stepping Into Heaven

2 Corinthians 5:1-8
1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens
2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,
3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.
4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.
5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.
6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.
7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.
8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

When people die in Christ, their spirits and souls leave the earth and enter heaven. They have changed residence. They have exchanged their earthly home for a heavenly one. They have checked out of earth and checked into heaven! In this earthly house they "groaned"—faced all kinds of hardships, pressures of life, challenges, suffered persecutions, battled sicknesses, and so on. But the instant they died, they left all these miseries behind and stepped into life in heaven. They are absent from this world, absent

from our midst, and absent from their physical bodies. However, they are present in heaven, they are present with the Lord, they are present in their eternal home—a house not made with hands.

To Depart Is Far Better

Philippians 1:20-24
20 According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.
21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.
23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.
24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

In view of the above fact, for us believers, "to die is gain." To depart and be with Christ is "far better." Death is not a defeat. Death is not a time of despair. Death is an entry into something that is far better, something that is more glorious than our finest hour on earth. Our loved ones who died in Christ are now experiencing things we have never experienced. Yes, their absence is felt after their departure. Our heart misses their company, their fellowship, and the times we shared. But that pain and longing is just something we experience. Our loved ones, on the other hand, are experiencing great joy. They are in the presence of Christ. Looking at their departure from this perspective should cause us to lay our personal sorrow aside and rejoice in their joy—in their gain!!

Heaven Is a Wonderful Place

John 14:1-2
1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me.
2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 17:24
Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

Most of us who believe in Jesus may never have seen the Lord and heard His audible voice. We may have only felt His presence, experienced the leading of His Spirit, tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5). However, the moment believers in Christ die, they go to be with Jesus. They are where He is and can see His glory. They enter the place that the Lord Jesus has prepared for them. They are clothed in garments of white (Revelation 3:5). They see the heavenly creatures worshipping and giving glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever (Revelation 4:9). They join in this unending worship. They meet with the millions who have gone on before us. There is so much more, both what we know and

what we do not know, about the glories of heaven! Our loved ones, who have departed in Christ, are in heaven—a wonderful place!

Comfort One Another With These Words

1 Thessalonians 4:16–18
16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.
17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.
18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

One of the primary reasons for the Lord to reveal truths about death, heaven, resurrection, and the life hereafter is for us to be people of hope. With this hope founded on the Word of God, we can comfort one another. These Scriptures have been given so that we can be comforted—strengthened and energized to continue in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). However, we cannot draw and experience the comfort of the Scriptures if we do not choose to believe in them and act upon them. We need to conform our thinking, our believing, and our behavior to what the Scriptures teach us.

Some of us, in times of grief, prefer the sympathy of men over the comfort of the Scriptures. We enjoy the attention we receive, and the sympathetic gestures people make. However, people cannot continue providing their sympathy forever. And when this stops, we feel that no one cares, and no one understands what we are going through. However, the truth of the matter is that we are at fault. We have a weakness for depending on the sympathy of people rather than depending on the comfort of the Scriptures. We must overcome this weakness. We must discipline ourselves to meditate on God's Word and draw strength from Him and His Word.

Unanswered Questions

Often, at times like these, there are many questions that can arise and remain unanswered: Why did someone die so young? Why did they have to die of sickness, in an accident, or through some other calamity? Why were they not healed, protected, or delivered by the power of God? Why? Why? Why? The questions can seem endless. As we mature in our walk with God, we will learn to accept the fact that there are many questions that will remain unanswered on this side of heaven. Of course, we can always attempt to provide answers like "lack of revelation knowledge," "lack of faith," and so on. But all these answers are, at best, an attempt to provide an answer and we do not know for sure. Each situation is unique with many variables, and so much is unknown to us. For now, we know in part, but then when that which is perfect has come, we will know just as we are known (1 Corinthians 13:10,12). "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children*

forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deuteronomy 29:29). It is wise to accept the fact that we may never have definite answers to such questions. However, we must continue to live by the things that we do know.

While We Are Still Here On Earth

2 Corinthians 5:9-10
9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.
10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Hebrews 12:1
Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Those who have died and gone on before us have left us their life's testimony. They have done what they could for the Kingdom of God. And today, perhaps, they are looking down from the galleries of heaven, on us who are still running life's race. We must, therefore, make it our aim to run with endurance the race that God has set before us. We must endeavor to be pleasing to Him in everything we do. We cannot remain in our place of sorrow or grief. We must arise from the place where we bid farewell to our loved ones and keep moving on in the call of God. For one day, we along with those who have gone ahead of us in Christ, will stand before the Lord to receive according to what we have done for His Kingdom here on earth. May all who have gone on before us find us faithful!

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At All Peoples Church (APC), our vision is to be salt and light in the city of Bangalore and a voice to the nation of India and to the nations of the world.

At APC, we are committed to presenting the complete, uncompromised Word of God in the anointing and demonstration of His Holy Spirit. We believe that good music, creative presentations, brilliant apologetics, contemporary ministry techniques, latest technology, and so on, can never substitute the God-ordained approach of proclaiming the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit with signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Hebrews 2:3-4). Our theme is Jesus, our content is the Word, our method is Holy Spirit power, our passion is people, and our goal is Christlike maturity.

With our main base in Bangalore, All Peoples Church has several other church locations in India. To get a current listing and contact information of All Peoples Church locations, please visit our website at **www.apcwo.org/locations** or send an email to **contact@apcwo.org**.

DO YOU KNOW THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU?

About 2000 years ago, God came into this world as a man. His name is Jesus. He lived a perfectly sinless life. Since Jesus was God in flesh, everything He said and did revealed God to us. The words He spoke were the very words of God. The things He did were the actions of God. Jesus did many miracles on the Earth. He healed the sick and suffering. He opened blind eyes, unstopped deaf ears, made the lame to walk and healed every kind of sickness and disease. He fed the hungry by miraculously multiplying a few loaves of bread, calmed the storm and did many other wonderful things.

All of these actions reveal to us that God is a good God who wants people to be well, whole, healthy, and happy. God wants to meet the needs of people.

So why then would God decide to become a man and step into our world? Why did Jesus come?

All of us have sinned and done things that are unacceptable before the God who created us. Sin has its consequences. Sin is like a great unsurpassable wall between God and us. Sin separates us from God. It prevents us from knowing and having a meaningful relationship with the One who created us. Therefore, many of us try to fill this void with other things.

Another consequence of our sins is eternal separation from God. In God's court, the penalty for sin is death. Death is eternal separation from God in hell.

But the good news is that we can be free from sin and be restored to God. The Bible says, *"***For the wages [payment] of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Romans 6:23).* Jesus paid for the sins of the whole world when He died on the cross. Then, three days later He rose again, showed Himself alive to many and then went back into heaven.

God is a God of love and mercy. He does not wish that any person be lost in hell. And so He came, to provide a way for the entire human race to be free from sin and its lasting consequences. He came to save sinners—to rescue people like you and me from sin and eternal death.

To receive this free forgiveness of sins, the Bible tells us that we have to do just one thing—accept what the Lord Jesus Christ did on the cross and to believe in Him whole-heartedly.

"… through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43).

… "That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

You too can receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins if you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following is a simple prayer to help you make a decision to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for you on the cross. This prayer will help you express your acceptance of what Jesus has done for you and receive forgiveness and cleansing for your sins. This prayer is only a guideline. You can also pray in your own words.

Dear Lord Jesus, today, I have understood what You did for me on the cross. You died for me, you shed Your precious blood and paid the penalty for my sins, so that I could be forgiven. The Bible tells me that whoever believes in You will receive forgiveness for their sins.

Today, I make a decision to believe in You and to accept what You did for me, by dying for me on the cross and rising again from the dead. I know I cannot save myself by my own good works, neither can any other human save me. I cannot earn forgiveness for my sins.

Today, I believe in my heart and say with my mouth that You died for me, You paid the penalty for my sins, You rose again from the dead, and by faith in You, I receive forgiveness and cleansing for my sins..

Thank You Jesus. Help me to love You, to know You more and to be faithful to You. Amen.

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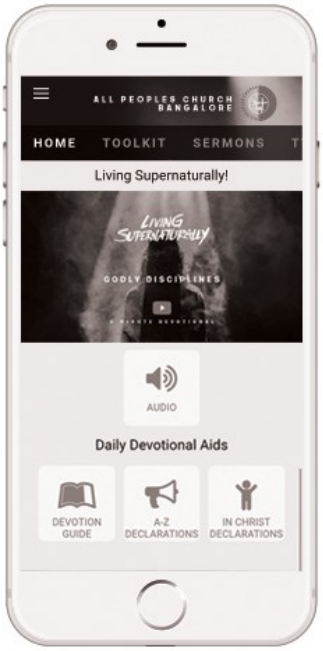

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